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## **Westlands Water District To Provide Habitat for Delta Smelt**

On December 13, 2007 Westlands announced that it acquired property in the northern Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The District plans to restore natural tidal wetlands and upland habitat for the protection and conservation of listed species, including the Delta smelt.

“We recognize that water is a sensitive issue, in Yolo County as in the rest of the state,” Birmingham said. “We plan to be a good neighbor in Yolo.”

As the smelt’s numbers have declined, a federal court in California has ordered new restrictions on Central Valley Project and State Water Project operations that will result in massive water supply reductions, amounting to a loss of one-third of the water that is normally delivered from the Delta. Those deliveries are needed to supply billions of dollars worth of agricultural production in the Central Valley and meet the water needs of two-thirds of the state’s residents.

These restrictions are in addition to prior restrictions prescribed for the protection of the smelt and come on top of two years of an ongoing drought. As a result, many experts are predicting major losses for the state’s economy and water shortages in the Bay Area, Los Angeles, Orange County, and San Diego.

“Saving the smelt is an issue of self-preservation for most of California,” Birmingham said. “Regulation of the state’s water supply projects alone hasn’t worked, and as a public agency with responsibility for providing water for more than 500,000 acres of farmland, the District’s Board of Directors decided we need to act directly to help solve a critical problem.”

The Delta property that Westlands acquired is in the area identified by state and federal fisheries experts as the prime location to create habitat for the smelt. Lying at the southernmost tip of Yolo County, the property is currently used for farming. Westlands plans to convert portions of the property to create habitat for the smelt and maintain the rest in agriculture.

Westlands is committed to listening to and working with its new neighbors, local government, water suppliers and flood control entities that have a shared interest in how environmental improvement is accomplished.

“The plight of the smelt is just one part of the problems facing the Delta,” Birmingham pointed out. “We’re working with other public water agencies, state and federal authorities, and the scientific community to define ways to restore the Delta, increase the reliability and adequacy of water deliveries, and ensure the safety of the public water supply. It is a complicated process, but everyone agrees that protecting the smelt is an essential element of any comprehensive plan for restoring the Delta and providing improved conveyance.”

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